DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 107 RC 021 189

TITLE	Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools. IDRA Focus.
INSTITUTION	Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, TX.
ISSN	ISSN-1069-5672
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	21p.; Photographs will not reproduce adequately.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	IDRA Newsletter; v24 n10 Nov-Dec 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Conflict Resolution; Crime; *Discipline Problems; Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Intervention; Nontraditional Education; Parent Participation; Parent Student Relationship; *Prevention; *School Safety; *Student Behavior; Substance Abuse; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Drug Free Schools; School Recognition Programs; *Texas

ABSTRACT

This theme issue focuses on programs and strategies aimed at developing crime-free, nonviolent, drug-free schools. "Alternative Education Programs: Resolution or Exclusion?" (Albert Cortez) describes alternative education programs mandated by Texas state legislation for serious student offenders, and related issues of assessment, due process, curriculum, and personnel. "Essential Ingredients for Creating Safe, Orderly, Drug-Free Schools" lists and explains 11 steps to achieving safe schools. "Are We Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools?" (Anita Revilla, Christie L. Goodman) presents national and Texas state statistics on school drug use and violence in relation to Goals 2000. "Look Who's Listening: Communication Between Parents and Teenagers" (Aurelio M. Montemayor) describes monthly parent-student meetings at Cummings Middle School (Brownsville, Texas). "'I Am What I Am'--Resolving Conflict Peacefully" (Juanita Garcia) details the work of the Texas STAR Center in enabling school leaders to experience and learn approaches for improved community-school communication. A sidebar lists four strategies for conflict resolution. A statewide recognition program conducted by the STAR Center is explained in "Texas Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities 1996-97 Recognition Program" (Dorothy L. Knight). "Facing Denial and Fostering Support" (Carlos Sundermann-Villavicencio) narrates a personal experience of a school's failure to intervene to prevent a student suicide and states ways to create a disciplined school environment. Contains references and World Wide Web site resources. This issue includes a cumulative index to the IDRA Newsletter for 1997. (SAS)

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXIV, No. 10 Nov./Dec. 1997

IDRA Focus:
Creating Safe and
Drug-Free Schools

Alternative Education Programs: Resolution or Exclusion?

Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

ED 414 107

Inside this Issue:

- *Statistics on violence and drug use*
- *Parent and teen discussion groups*
- *Administrator faces a challenge*
- *Texas schools recognition program*

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The Texas Legislature in 1995 adopted a new state policy requiring that each school system create alternative education programs, including "alternative educational settings for behavioral management." These programs were intended to address concerns raised by classroom teachers. Many teachers had expressed the need for student disciplinary options that would allow them to remove from their classes students who were engaged in serious misbehavior.

The new policy specifies that students may be removed to alternative education programs if they engage in conduct punishable as a felony or if they commit a series of specified serious offenses while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off school property. The statute also provided for students to be removed to alternative education programs if they commit other violations specified in student "codes of conduct" developed by local school districts.

What began as a discussion on how to effectively address serious student offenders was quickly expanded to a much broader initiative to increase educators' prerogatives to remove *any* student considered to be disruptive. At first glance, it appears that creating alternative educational settings for seriously disruptive students is a reasonable and, for some, a necessary alternative (particularly if the other option is simply to expel students to roam unsupervised outside of the schools). No doubt that for the small number of pupils who do engage in seriously disruptive behavior, removal to an alternative educational setting is appropriate. But, while being well intended by most people, these alternative educational programs may also provide easy opportunities for schools to exile or track certain students who they may have given up on or written off.

There is the potential for overusing alternative education program referrals and for using this punitive measure disproportionately on certain groups of students. This suggests that educators and community advocates should carefully monitor the large numbers of alternative education programs that are now operating in most communities in Texas.

Alternative Education Program Referrals

In addition to the more serious offenses specified in the law, the state policy specifies that teachers may remove from a class any student the teacher perceives as "so unruly, disruptive or abusive that it seriously interferes with the teacher's ability to communicate effectively with the students in the class or with the ability of the student's classmates to learn" (TEC, 1995).

Local school districts are encouraged either to house these programs at a separate campus or, when that is not possible, to create separate instructional settings where referred students can be separated from other students attending the same campus.

According to the Texas Education Agency, disciplinary alternative programs must meet the following criteria (which is outlined in the state policy):

- The program is provided in a setting other than the student's regular classroom.
- The program is located on or off a regular school campus.
- The program separates the students who are assigned to the program from students

Alternative Education - continued on page 10

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IN THIS ISSUE

5 *COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEENS*

7 *RESOLVING CONFLICT PEACEFULLY*

8 *REFLECTIONS & COMMENTARY NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL PAGE*

12 *SUMMARY REPORT... RECOGNITION PROGRAM*

The Intercultural Development Research Association *(IDRA)* is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity. The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, copyright ©1997) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision makers, parents and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR CREATING SAFE, ORDERLY, DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS

Placing school safety high on the educational agenda. Such a priority involves making a personal and community commitment toward creating a safe, welcoming, respectful, gun-free and drug-free school.

Involving parents and citizens. No plan can succeed without the participation of parents and citizens in the community. Planners must make certain to bring these participants to the table often to shape strategies and programs together. Most people dislike having things "done to them." They enjoy being a part of planning, carrying out and evaluating programs in which they have invested concern and time. Those affected by safe school plans should be involved throughout the entire process.

Building and developing the team. Making schools safe is a joint responsibility, requiring a broad-based team and a working attitude emphasizing collaboration and cooperation. Team members should include educators, parents, students, law enforcers, community and business leaders, probation and court representatives, social service and health care providers, and other youth-serving professionals.

Conducting the school site assessment. Team members should determine the specific issues and concerns that the local community believes are most important. This step begins the process of developing a meaningful safe school plan that will foster an increased level of community commitment.

Reviewing the law. The law is at the heart of every major school safety issue today. Laws are intended to articulate the reasonable standards that define the delicate balance between student rights and student responsibilities. The law proclaims what must be done, implies what should be done and establishes limits for what may be done. The law constitutes a code of professional expectations for school administrators and youth-serving professionals. As planning begins, school and community leaders should consult with the school district's attorneys to ensure that legal issues are appropriately addressed. Constitutional issues, as well as other concerns ranging from adequate liability insurance to the effective screening of volunteers, may arise with the implementation of a comprehensive violence prevention program.

Creating a "safe school plan." This is an action plan that not only includes the substance of what is necessary to accomplish certain goals but also identifies the processes by which those goals will be achieved, including short-term objectives and long-term systemic changes. It is most important for team members to understand that they can make a positive difference in the quality of life for themselves, their community and children they serve.

Formulating a contingency plan. Having a backup plan for handling emergencies and crises simply makes good sense. Such foresight can prevent a crisis and preclude successive crises while creating an effective mechanism for managing school problems.

Creating an educational climate. Team members should evaluate the current education atmosphere and propose modifications that will transform it into a safe, vibrant learning environment in which students and teachers respect each other.

Searching for ways to serve students and ways students can serve. Young people should always be included as part of the solution to the problems associated with juvenile delinquency. Actively engaging students in school and community projects and activities creates a level of ownership that supports the success of every child.

Getting the message out, communicating. Working with the media may be one of the most successful strategies for building awareness of both the issues involved and the progress being made. With simple newsletters, schools can share success stories and break down barriers with other districts and schools.

Evaluating progress. It is important to monitor activities, measure impact and evaluate how the plan is working. A safe school plan should be modified and improved whenever necessary.

Excerpted from "National Center for Education Statistics. "Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide." U.S. Department of Education. Internet posting (September 1996).

Are We Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools?

Anita Revilla, M.A., and Christie L. Goodman, A.P.R.

It seems obvious that a school should be a safe environment for students. Yet the reality is that many schools are not safe havens for children. The problem is so widespread that the sixth goal of *Goals 2000* addresses drug use and violence in schools specifically: "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning." It includes seven objectives for schools to accomplish:

- a firm policy on drug and alcohol use;
- collaborative planning with parents, businesses, governmental and community organizations;
- a local policy against violence and weapons;
- a drug and alcohol prevention education program for children;
- a drug and alcohol curriculum in health education;
- supportive community-based teams; and
- the elimination of sexual harassment (National Education Goals Panel, 1996).

Adolescent Drug Use Has Increased

Unlike previous administrations, the Clinton administration has directed more attention to drug abuse prevention rather than fighting a drug war against users and suppliers. "Our number one priority is reducing the demand for illegal drugs by our kids," said Pancho Kinney, spokesman for Gen. Barry McCaffrey who heads the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (Garcia, 1997).

To this effect, officials have targeted schools and monitored the programs that address the seven objectives mentioned above. They have also brokered partnerships between non-profit campaigns and the private sector to generate awareness of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

As a result, since 1985 overall drug use is down by 50 percent and cocaine use is down by 75 percent among adults (Burke, 1997). That is 10 million fewer users.

Illegal drugs are used by 12.8 million people in the United States. This includes 9.8 million marijuana users, 1.5 million cocaine users, and 600,000 heroin addicts. Illegal drug use occurs among members of every ethnic and socio-economic group in the United States (Garcia, 1997).

The current major concern is that adolescent drug use has been increasing since 1992. In fact, use of some drugs by teens has more than doubled. A nationwide survey of 141,077 students in junior high and high school shows an increase in drug use, particularly for students ages 11 to 14 years old (PRIDE, 1997).

Thomas Gleaton, president of the Parent's Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE), the Atlanta-based organization that conducts the survey annually, added:

> Senior high drug use may have stalled, but it is stalled at the highest levels we have measured in 10 years. Until we see sharp declines in use at all grade levels, there will be no reason to rejoice (1997).

Other data indicates that 25 percent of 12th graders are using illegal drugs monthly, compared to 14 percent in 1992. Illegal drug use is 23 percent among 10th graders, up from 11 percent in 1992; and it is 15 percent among eighth graders, up from 7 percent in 1992 (Burke, 1997).

In Texas, 20 percent of fourth graders from low-income families used a substance (tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, marijuana) in the past school year. The percentage is slightly less for students from families at other income levels. However the trend switches for older students. In grades eight through 12, the percentage use by students in low-income families is less than that of students in families of other income levels. Substance abuse by 12th grade students reaches almost 80 percent (TCADA, 1996).

Preventing drug use among young people also helps reduce crimes and violence, HIV/AIDS, school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, teenage suicide and health care costs (Burke, 1997).

Research indicates that there is a direct link between an increase in anti-drug attitudes and a decline in drug use. In fact, when "perceived risks" and "peer disapproval" toward drug abuse are high, drug abuse by young people goes down. This is true among all demographic characteristics and rural vs. urban areas (Burke, 1997).

Gen. McCaffrey states that a key to fighting the rise of drug abuse among teens is parental involvement and parents educating their children about the dangers of drugs. Teens who say they have learned a lot about the risks of drugs from their parents are half as likely to use marijuana as those who say they learned nothing about drugs from their parents. Yet, only one in four teens learn much from their parents about the risks of drugs.

According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, nine out of 10 current adult users of cocaine started using drugs as teenagers and one-half started before their 16th birthday (Burke, 1997).

James Burke, chairman of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, summarizes the findings: "The data shows that if we can help our kids get through their teenage years without trying drugs, they are likely never to use drugs as adults" (1997).

Adolescent Violence Has Increased

The U.S. Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey data show that an estimated 2.7 million violent crimes take place annually either at school

Are We Creating - continued on page 4

Did You Know?

20% of high school students carried a weapon during the past 30 days.

24% of high school students considered suicide in the past year.

35% of high school students are current cigarette smokers.

25% of 12th graders use illegal drugs monthly.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Partnership for a Drug-Free America

Are We Creating - continued from page 3

or near schools (NCES, 1996).

In a national longitudinal study on adolescent health, one in four students indicated that they had been a victim of violence, and one in eight reported that they had carried a weapon over the previous 30 days (JAMA, 1997).

Results of a 1993 survey conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggest that unsafe conditions at school are a reality for most U.S. students. Half of sixth through 12th grade students personally witnessed some type of crime or victimization. One in eight students reported being directly victimized at school. The survey defined "victimization" as direct personal experiences of threats or harm as well as knowledge or witness of crime or incidents of bullying at school (NCES, 1996).

Witnessing incidents of bullying, physical attack or robbery did not vary significantly for students of different grade levels. However, students' worries about victimization decreased after middle school. More elementary (29 percent) and middle school students (34 percent) said they worried about becoming victims at school than did high school students (20 percent) (NCES, 1996).

The NCES study found that a greater percentage of students at schools containing 600 or more students than those attending schools of fewer than 300 students reported knowledge of crime or threats at school and witnessing crime. But, there was no difference in worry about crime or in actual victimization for students at larger schools (NCES, 1996).

Exposure to crime and threats at school crosses racial and ethnic boundaries. Worry and victimization did not differ by student's race or school racial composition (NCES, 1996).

In Texas, schools reported decreases in the number of assaults against students (down 5.8 percent) and against teachers and staff (down 33.8 percent) between the 1994-95 and 1995-96 school years (TEA, 1996). They reported increases in acts of vandalism:

- Acts of vandalism or criminal mischief against *school property* rose 124 percent.
- Acts of vandalism or criminal mischief against *student property* rose 263 percent.
- Acts of vandalism or criminal mischief against *teacher or staff property* rose 125 percent.

The number of firearms and other weapons confiscated has gone down 40 percent, and school-related gang violence has remained steady in Texas.

Schools Are Resorting to Removing Students

Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code details the discipline, law and order regulations enforceable for safe schools to exist (TEA, 1994). The law outlines some reasons that students can be removed from their regular classroom settings:

- Offense of assault or terroristic threat.
- Use or selling of illegal drugs, alcohol, and/or abusable glue and paint.
- Public lewdness.
- Retaliation against any school employee.

Students may also be removed for violating the student code of conduct that is created by individual local school districts at their discretion. A student may be expelled if he or she

- uses, exhibits or possesses a firearm, an illegal knife, a club or a weapon;
- engages in aggravated assault, kidnapping, criminal mischief, murder, felony or indecency with a child; or
- continues to violate the district's student code of conduct (TEA, 1994).

The Texas Education Agency released its Chapter 37 Safe School Survey results in October 1996. This survey documents the number of students referred to disciplinary alternative education programs and mandatory offense expulsions in the 1995-96 school year. The data represents several different geographic areas including major urban, major suburban, central city, independent town, rural and non-metro districts. According to the data, 70,958 students were referred to alternative programs, and 5,601 students were expelled (TEA, 1996).

One concern that arises with a close examination of the findings is the disproportionate numbers of certain students (regarding ethnicity and district type) that are being referred to disciplinary alternative education programs.

Hispanic students in major urban districts were referred to disciplinary alternative education programs four times more often than were White students, and African American students were referred almost three times more often than were White students (TEA, 1996).

Another finding that raises questions is the fact that discretionary reasons under the student codes of conduct were the most frequent reasons for students' referrals to alternative programs. An overwhelming 73,302 referrals out of a total of 99,381 were reported as discretionary (some students were referred more than once) (TEA, 1996).

In order for alternative education programs to achieve positive outcomes, the number of students in disciplinary alternative education programs must decrease, and the number of days spent in the alternative settings should be kept to a minimum. These students should receive educational counseling and other support services needed to cause true behavioral change and conflict resolution. The law states that the quality of education in alternative programs must be equal to that of the regular school settings, and high standards must be maintained for all students.

A careful study of student outcomes in disciplinary alternative education programs will be needed, especially regarding district type, race and ethnicity (see "Alternative Education Programs" on Page 1).

We must combat the so-called "culture of alternative education," in which we discard all unwanted students into alternative settings far and away from the "good" students. Administrators can also choose to stay away from suspending and expelling students for discretionary reasons and move toward other solutions for maintaining discipline on school campuses.

For example, the NCES survey found that appearing "older than most" in class was associated with emotional distress and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among high schools students. It was associated with substance use and an earlier age of sexual debut among junior and senior high students. Repeating a grade in school was also associated with emotional distress in junior and high school and with tobacco use among junior high students (NCES, 1996).

Avoiding violence and drug abuse is most effective when the causes of such behaviors are examined. Removal of students considered disruptive is a punitive measure. Schools and students will benefit much more significantly by undertaking preventive measures. A step that has been taken by many schools, and for which IDRA offers training and technical assistance, is conflict resolution and peer mediation (see "I Am What I Am" on Page 7).

Resources

Burke, James. Unpublished presentation. (New York, NY: Partnership for a Drug-Free America, 1997).

Garcia, James E. "U.S. Drug Battleground." *Time* magazine (October 1997).

Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from

Are We Creating - continued on page 11

Look Who's Listening: Communication Between Parents and Teenagers

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Sandra A. Powers and Eddie Martinez have started something dynamic – parents and teenagers communicating with each other about difficult topics. No small feat!

Ms. Powers is the parent-teacher-community liaison for Cummings Middle School in Brownsville, Texas. At the time, Mr. Martinez was a science teacher who also served as the teacher coordinator for the campus' Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – a cross-age tutoring program created by IDRA in which students who are in at-risk situations are placed as tutors to younger students.

Need to Communicate

As educators committed to making a difference in the lives of their students and their families, Ms. Powers said that she and Mr. Martinez kept noticing the generation gap:

> The kids at the middle school have a lot of peer pressure, a lot of high emotions going on during this time, and we wanted the kids to hear what the parents are going through also. It is not only a hard time for them [the teenagers] but it's a hard time for parents.

They wanted the students and the parents to understand the difficulties of communicating with each other and to hear each other's point of view.

Parents need to hear from young people "what they're going through" and how they feel about discipline and what works best. Teenagers need to let adults know how it feels to be "bombarded with questions" and with other interactions. Teenagers need to empathize with the parents' dilemmas of hard work, not having work or not being able to find work. Both sides need to be aware when they are misconstruing things that are being said.

Space for Communication

To close the gap, Ms. Powers and Mr. Martinez proposed parent-student dialogues because "the need of the middle school is a little different from the elementary level." The principal at the time, Dr. Roberto Rodriguez, agreed to create a space to "get both sides on a common ground and hear each other out." Ms. Powers already ran an effective parent center at the middle school, which is unusual because parent centers are typically found at elementary schools.

The group decided that the tutors in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program would be the student participants. To propose topics and presentations for monthly meetings, they invited parents from the Brownsville school district parent education center. They compiled a list of the tutors' parents and added it to the list of parents who were already being regularly invited to center events.

Fliers written in English and in Spanish were sent home with students two days before the meeting. The notices invited the parents to meetings with their children and other students to discuss the particular topic selected for that meeting. Parent volunteers also called each home with a reminder. Some meetings were solely for the parents of the tutors in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and other meetings were open to anyone.

Ideas for topics came from several sources. Javier Perez, who works with the parent education center, offered to facilitate themes. The school district trains parents to present on a variety of topics. The parents learn to perform skits or pose questions as catalysts for dialogues in parent meetings. Mr. Martinez recalled that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program had originally held Saturday events in which students and parents came together for meetings where parents and students presented to each other and developed role reversal skits, with the parents acting like the teenagers and the teenagers taking on parent roles.

Parents and Teens in Discussion Sessions

The meetings began with a sign-in and refreshments. Sessions opened with each student and parent stating why they were there. All meetings were in English as well as Spanish and were conducted so that parents with limited literacy skills could actively participate.

Parents and students introduced themselves to the group. It was understood that each person participating had equal rights and responsibilities for carrying on the dialogue. No one's opinion was laughed at or dismissed. Some sessions began with a formal presentation, others began with questions. Sometimes participants would sing

***Look Who's Listening** - continued on page 6*

Parents and students from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program gather for dialogues at Cummings Middle School in Brownsville, Texas.

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Look Who's Listening - continued from page 5

a song or draw a picture story about themselves or whatever the topic was about. Parents and students felt that they had an opportunity to share what they were feeling during the presentation. The students were encouraged to ask questions and speak up on issues important to them. Teenagers whose parents were in the session tended to be more quiet and would not be as outspoken as they were when their parents were not there.

Participants evaluated each session and made further suggestions on topics. This is important because students are rarely asked to evaluate their classes or what topics they want to discuss in school. For the parents this was an important activity because many of them had limited formal education and were not normally in a position to evaluate educational experiences. The evaluations provided ideas for future sessions and also validated the importance of the meetings.

Last year, the sessions were held from October to May with full support from the new principal, Mr. Castillo. The topics for the 1995-96 school year included

- How to read your child's assessment results,
- The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test,
- Rights and responsibilities of parents,
- The importance of attendance,
- How to discipline with love,
- Communicating with your child, and
- Drug abuse.

At the last meeting, there was a summation of the accomplishments of the year along with a celebration. All participants expressed a desire to repeat the experiences the next year. There were tears of farewell from adults and teenagers, just as there had been tears from feelings that came up in some of the dialogues.

This year, the sessions began in November with a new teacher coordinator for the tutors and continued support from the principal.

What Teenagers Learned

Students testified to a better understanding of their parents, the decisions they made and child rearing approaches. They learned about the power of expressing themselves more openly and honestly with their parents. They experienced the effect of restating how much they cared about each other. Students realized the importance of setting goals to have a more economically secure life than their parents did. They learned the importance of planning for the future.

Some adolescents had new understandings about parents. For example, parents do not want to be mean, but often set rules because of severe financial problems or difficult work schedules. A few students were stunned by the realization that if they regularly lied to a parent, it became very difficult to be believed when they told the truth.

Some parents have a lot of pressure getting and keeping a job and putting food on the table. Consequently, sometimes they wish their children would just do their schoolwork and not have any additional problems. Parents want their children to have a better life. For some families, the economic situation has been hard, and parents do not want their children to suffer the same way they did.

What Parents Learned

The parents learned from the young people that their silence at home does not mean that they are up to no good. Young people want their own set of friends and have a need to belong. Young people need their space. Yelling does not work anymore, and spanking is outdated and counterproductive. One student said, "If you hit me, you can't expect me to listen to you. It doesn't work like that."

Parents were reminded that their teenagers still need them but in different ways than when they were younger. Adolescents need parents more because they have many choices to make. Parents found that they had not understood the depth of their teenagers' confusion. Parents were reminded that their children still had one foot in childhood and another in emerging adulthood. The elementary to middle school shift is a difficult adjustment for students where they have six teachers instead of one. Parents listened to their children say that sometimes when a student comes home and complains about a teacher, they need to be believed – "they're not making it up."

What the Campus Learned

Dialogue and communication are important. Few educators have been trained to facilitate a dialogue, whether among students about issues critical to teenagers, or across generations between teenagers and adults. The adults and adolescents that participated in these discussions are not people who would typically experience this type of interaction in a meeting, club or organization. The skills needed to be a mentor and advocate both for students who are experiencing problems and for the parents of those young people, are not normally taught

Look Who's Listening - continued on page 15

Seventh and Eighth Graders Give Feedback on the Parent-Student Dialogues

"Meeting with the parents was a very good idea. We got to talk to them, and they gave us advice that really helped us mostly in getting along with the teachers and parents."

– Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor

"[This] has been a very nice idea because all the topics we talked about were very interesting and educational."

– Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor

"They really gave us good advice, to stay away from drugs, to get along with your parents and get along with your teachers and pass our classes and do our work. We talked about behavior and making good friends."

– Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor

"[This] helped me with my parents. The parents also gave us their point of view about many things that have helped me a lot."

– Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor

"[The dialogues] helped me a lot in school and at home. It helped me [improve] my grades and [learning]... how I can get along with everybody without causing more problems."

– Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutor

"I Am What I Am" – Resolving Conflict Peacefully

Juanita Garcia, M.A.

We live in a society that has been accustomed to high levels of violence. Skill and courage are required to resolve disputes peacefully. The STAR Center*, in collaboration with education service centers throughout Texas, is assisting schools in preventing violence.

This effort includes a series of three-day institutes in which school leaders convene to experience and learn approaches that will result in improved communication within the schools and community. Conflict management and mediation can provide the skills necessary to turn daily crises into learning situations.

There is an old Mexican proverb that says *"cada cabeza es un mundo"* or "every person is a world within themselves." We are all so very different, and conflicts arise daily. It is part of our human condition. As an experienced classroom teacher and school administrator, I can attest to the numerous conflicts that occur within the school setting.

Our students are saturated with images from the media that are based on redemptive violence – that is, violence that justifies revenge of the protagonist or underdog. "Popeye" is an example of an underdog justifying revenge on the bully ("Bluto") as the damsel in distress ("Olive Oil") cheers him on. The message is this: If someone hurts you, then it is okay to hurt them back. Many adults reinforce this message to their children. I have heard many parents tell their children, "If someone hits you, then you hit them back."

But trying to *settle* conflicts with violence does not work. We as parents and educators must teach our children that the best way to resolve problems is through honest communication.

The most important skill in effective communication is *listening*. When we communicate, we use words (or verbal forms) about 7 percent of the time and nonverbal forms 93 percent. Nonverbal forms of communication include tone, facial expressions, posture and gestures (Mehrabian, 1968). We use the skills of writing 9 percent of the time, reading 16 percent, speaking 35 percent and listening 40 percent. The communication skill that we use the most, listening, is the one for which we have the least formal training (zero to six months). The most difficult thing students have to do in school is listen. And listening is vital in resolving conflicts peaceably (Collier, 1997).

A good conflict resolution session will fully utilize all aspects of communication. While the students learn to be "active listeners," they also develop their verbal skills. *Verbalization* is essential for problem-solving. The parties in conflict help each other to gain an understanding of each other's situations through their verbal interaction.

Verbal skills have even further implications when you apply them to students' academic success. Dr. José A. Cárdenas writes in his new book, *My Spanish-Speaking Left Foot*:

> Since verbalization is key to cognitive development and subsequent academic achievement, it is surprising that more verbalization does not take place in U.S. schools attended by language-minority students (1997).

Cárdenas notes that his experience with schools in Mexico enlightened him to the fact that the encouragement of verbalization in the classroom led to higher verbal activity and higher reading ability. He observed that students in Mexico had better reading skills than did students in the United States in either all-English or bilingual classrooms.

In a conflict resolution training session, our goal is *autonomous learning* because providing solutions to problems disempowers students to create their own solutions. The internal environment is key. Students' feelings must be validated, and students must be trained to resolve conflicts peacefully. Parent education and transferring skills to the home is another objective of the session. Participants learn to serve as better mediators between students and peers – adult to adult and student to student.

Thus, it is important for us to re-evaluate students' abilities to resolve conflict. Too often, administrators, counselors and teachers doubt students' abilities to problem-solve. I have heard a teacher say, "These students come from backgrounds that don't enable them to resolve conflict peacefully. We have to admit that people from low-income backgrounds do not practice conflict resolution." An administrator said that her students just do not have the ability to communicate, perhaps because of their "limited language skills."

People can blame students' economic background, their cultural upbringing or even their language, but whatever differences students may have, those differences do not prohibit them from learning. Poor, minority and linguistic minority students are not incapable of gaining and developing problem-solving skills. It is the responsibility of the teacher, administrator and counselor to teach all students to become peaceful problem-solvers. In order to do this, they must believe in and value their students instead of attacking them for their differences.

The next phase of the STAR Center's work in assisting schools to prevent violence involves working with an inner city school, its students and staff to make it a model peaceable school that others can then

"I Am What I Am" - continued on page 15

Strategies for Conflict Resolution

Peer Mediation Approach
Specially trained student mediators work with their peers to resolve conflicts, recognizing the importance of directly involving youth in conflict resolution.

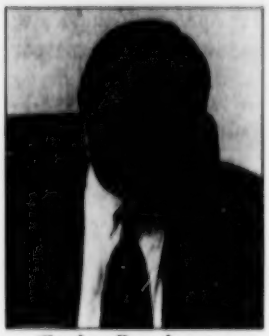
Process Curriculum Approach
Teachers devote a specific time – a separate course, distinct curriculum or a daily lesson – to the principles, foundation abilities and problem-solving processes of conflict resolutions.

Peaceable Classroom Approach
Teachers integrate conflict resolution into the curriculum and daily management of the classroom using instructional methods of cooperative learning and "academy controversy."

Peaceable School Approach
The school incorporates the above three approaches in order to promote a climate that challenges youth and adults to believe and act on the understanding that a diverse, nonviolent society is a realistic goal.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. "Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide." U.S. Department of Education. Internet posting (September 1996).

REFLECTIONS



Carlos Sundermann-Villavicencio

FACING DENIAL AND FOSTERING SUPPORT

If violence, racism, discipline problems, and drug and alcohol abuse are rampant at school and in the community then chances are very likely that no matter how high we set our standards, we are going to continue to hurt kids. When children, youth and teachers do not feel safe and when disruptions interrupt teaching and learning, school improvement is impossible. A fundamental prerequisite for school reform begins with a comprehensive prevention program. That is the foundation for establishing a school climate conducive to teaching and learning.

After five years as a high school principal in a small school in western Montana, the staff and I had fooled ourselves into thinking that we were doing all we could to turn around the drug and alcohol problem at our school. Our instincts told us that we needed to talk to the kids about the dangers of drugs. We did plenty of that, and the kids weren't interested. We provided many activities on weekends when kids complained that they had "nothing to do" and some kids still continued to use drugs and alcohol. We set high standards, developed zero tolerance statements and policies, held drug-free school rallies, had red ribbon week and "just say no" campaigns, and the kids we wanted to reach just laughed at us. We started suspending kids left and right and inadvertently provided more opportunities for them to use alcohol and drugs and more opportunities for them to get into trouble. Did we ever do anything right?

I remember that a group of kids developed interesting video "infomercials" for a health class that were shared with the whole student body. One in particular stands out in my mind. A young man is shown smoking a joint and drinking as he is holding a photograph of his family. The camera zooms to the photograph while a voice says, "This is your family." The young man ignites the photograph with his lighter, and the voice continues, "This is your family on drugs." As the photo burns, the concluding statement is, "Any questions?" I remember being mesmerized by the reaction of many of our students. One student snickered nervously, but most were touched, at least momentarily. In the eyes of a 15-year-old girl who was pregnant, I detected tears.

That came at the end of a long hard year. I went away from that experience with a glimmer of hope that maybe we could actually begin to reach some of our students the following year.

At about the start of my fifth year as principal, in fact, three days before the staff was to return to school for orientation, I got a call from the school board chairman telling me that one of our students had been killed in an accident. We would have to postpone our teacher orientation day, and I would ask the teachers to attend "Benny's" funeral. The death of one of our students always came as a shock even though during every single one of the four previous school years we had come to know the reality of losing our students to a highway accident, a drowning, a suicide (one of our girls jumped off a bridge), a shooting, a stabbing. Funerals for older people I can accept, but I reflected that, in this community, the people who were dying were relatively young people, in their teens, their 20s, in their 30s. There was acceptance among the staff that the community and consequently the school had a serious drug abuse problem. There was also extreme frustration because our efforts seemed somehow fruitless.

Benny was an identical twin at our school. He was always more morose and sullen than his brother. He rarely smiled. In March, a teacher caught him smoking pot in the restroom, and I tried talking to him about why he was using. All he would say is, "You just don't understand." I sent him home with a referral for counseling and a request for a parent conference. He never came back to school, and his parents never came in to talk to me. We sent our home school liaison to look for them, but she could never locate the parents. His brother continued to come to school because he wanted to graduate. I tried to talk to him about Benny, but all he could say was that things at home were "pretty messed up." His brother said that Benny had given up on school because he just didn't see the point of any of it.

In the two days before the funeral I learned the details of Benny's death. Several boys, all students at our school, had been playing a game of Russian roulette. All of the boys had been drinking heavily. According to several accounts, the boys thought that the small .22 caliber handgun was not loaded. One of the boys who had been with Benny told me sometime after the funeral that when the gun went off, Benny crumpled to the floor and pleaded, "Someone please help me." The denial surrounding Benny's death in that community was almost universal. It had been an accident. The boys had just been messing around. Yeah, there had been a box of ammunition nearby, but they thought they were just blanks.

So we gathered for this young man's funeral. Some parts of this experience will always be etched in my memory. I remember seeing Benny in his coffin and the mirror image of his brother crying inconsolably above the coffin. I also remember noticing the bright clear blue of that late summer day, the snow capped peaks high above the valley floor, and a touch of Montana autumn in the air as Benny's coffin was lowered into the ground with his friends, relatives, community and teachers gathered around him. I remember thinking, "This has got to be one of the most beautiful places on earth. Why would anyone want to leave it all behind?" A soaring bald eagle screamed above our community, breaking the silence. I wondered what was in the minds of members of that community.

In the minds of many of his teachers that day was the thought, "What could I have done to make a difference?" I know because many of us shared these thoughts with each other when we talked about developing a program at school that would make sure that none of our

Facing Denial - continued on page 9

INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT • RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

CUMULATIVE INDEX
JANUARY 1997 - DECEMBER 1997

A

ACCOUNTABILITY (*see* SCHOOLS)
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION (*see* HIGHER EDUCATION)
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS: (2-97) 7-10; (10-97) 1, 10-11; (10-97) 3-4, 11
Alternative Education Programs: Resolution or Exclusion?, A. Cortez: (10-97) 1, 10-11
The Analogy of the Amoeba, Editorial, J.A. Cárdenas: (2-97) 11
Analysis of Educational Equity: Community Seeks Direction for Diversity, M.R. Montecel: (3-97) 19-20
Are We Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools? A. Revilla and C.L. Goodman: (10-97) 3-4, 11
ASSESSMENT: (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (7-97) 9
TAAS (1-97) 8-9, 13; (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (3-97) 19-20; (6-97) 4, 8; (8-97) 15-16; (7-97) 9
ATTRITION (*see* STUDENTS, ATTRITION)

B

Bauer, Hilaria: (4-97) 1-2, 11; (6-97) 3
BILINGUAL: (5-97) 5-6
EDUCATION: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (2-97) 7-10; (4-97) 5; (4-97) 6-7; (5-97) 1, 10-13; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15, (7-97) 6; (7-97) 9
TEACHERS (*see* TEACHERS)

C

Cantú, Linda: (9-97) 1, 14-15
Cárdenas, Blandina: (9-97) 8-9, 16
Cárdenas, José A.: (2-97) 11; (3-97) 11-12; (5-97) 5-6
Cárdenas, Oscar M.: (7-97) 6
Cavazos, Charles A.: (5-97) 7, 14;
A Checklist for Successful Distance Learning, C.A. Cavazos: (5-97) 7, 14
CHILDREN FIRST: (3-97) 4; (6-97) 2
China and the New Technology, J.A. Cárdenas: (5-97) 5-6
CIVIL RIGHTS (*see* EQUITY; DESEGREGATION ASSISTANCE)
COCA-COLA VALUED YOUTH PROGRAM: (4-97) 11; (7-97) 4-5, 8; (9-97) 1, 14-15; (10-97) 5-6, 15
Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program: "Because All Children Are Valuable," L. Cantú: (9-97) 1, 14-15
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL-BASED REFORM: (2-97) 13; (8-97) 1-2, 10-11
Community Leadership for Standards-Based Reform: (2-97) 13
CONFLICT RESOLUTION: (10-97) 7, 15
Coordinating Resources for Improved Achievement, J.F. Johnson: (3-97) 10
Cortez, Albert: (2-97) 3-4, 15-16; (2-97) 7-10; (3-97) 3, 5, 16; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (9-97) 11-12; (10-97) 1, 10-11
Cortez, Carmen P.: (8-97) 8-10
CREATIVE COLLABORATIVES: EMPOWERING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES THROUGH EDUCATION: (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11
Criteria for Diversity: THECB's Advisory Committee Suggests New Criteria, A. Cortez: (2-97) 3-4, 15-16
Cruising the Web with English Language Learners, L.C. Green: (5-97) 1, 10-13

D

Declaration: Children First: (3-97) 4
De La Garza Sweeney, Yvette: (6-97) 4, 8
DESEGREGATION ASSISTANCE: (1-97) 3-5, 10; (2-97) 3-4, 15-16; (3-97) 6-7, 10; (3-97) 19-20; (4-97) 4-5, 10; (5-97) 1, 10-13; (6-97) 3; (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11; (9-97) 11-12; (7-97) 3, 15; (10-97) 1, 10-11 (*see also* EQUITY)
A Different Kind of Will: Educational Equity and the School Reform Movement, B. Scott: (1-97) 3-5, 10
DIVERSITY: (2-97) 3-4, 15-16; (3-97) 19-20; (3-97) 11-12; (7-97) 6; (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11
Dr. Arturo Madrid Receives Prestigious NEH Award: (1-97) 16
Dr. Green Honored by Tex-TESOL: (10-97) 15
Dr. José Angel Cárdenas Receives University of Texas Distinguished Alumni Award: (8-97) 20
Dr. Robledo Montecel Honored by "Hispanic Business" Magazine and "La Prensa" Newspaper: (10-97) 16
DROPOUT PREVENTION (*see* STUDENTS, ATTRITION)

E

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: (4-97) 1-2, 11
EDUCATION
BILINGUAL (*see* BILINGUAL EDUCATION)
EARLY CHILDHOOD (*see* EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION)
EXPENDITURES (*see* SCHOOLS, FACILITIES AND FINANCE)
REFORM (*see* SCHOOLS, POLICY)
Equal Access: Mask of Discrimination, Editorial, O.M. Cárdenas: (7-97) 6
Equal Access to Quality School Facilities, R. Johnson: (3-97) 6-7, 10
EQUITY: (1-97) 3-5, 10; (3-97) 6-7, 10; (3-97) 11-12; (3-97) 19-20; (4-97) 8;

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Reading Index Entries

All entries in this cumulative index of the articles appearing in the 1997 issues of the *IDRA Newsletter* include the publication volume and the publication year in parentheses followed by the page(s) on which the article can be found.

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(7-97) 6; (8-97) 4; (9-97) 11-12
GENDER: (7-97) 3, 15
Equity and Excellence: Current Issues in the 75th Texas Legislative Session, A. Cortez and A.A. Romero: (2-97) 7-10
Essential Ingredients for Creating Safe, Orderly, Drug-Free Schools: (10-97) 2
Ethical and Other Considerations on Theory and Practice in Bilingual Student Teaching Seminars, Editorial, O.G. Rubio: (4-97) 6-7
Everything I Need to Know About Leadership Development I Learned in San Felipe, B. Cárdenas: (9-97) 8-9, 16

F

Facilities Renovation and Construction Opportunities and Challenges, A. Cortez: (9-97) 11-12
Facing Denial and Fostering Support, Editorial, C. Sundermann-Villavicencio: (10-97) 8-9
FAMILIES/PARENTS (*see* PARENTS)
FLAIR (FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC INSTRUCTIONAL RENEWAL): (1-97) 6-7, 14; (4-97) 3, 12
FUNDS AND PROGRAMS COORDINATION: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (3-97) 1-2, 13-14; (3-97) 8-9; (3-97) 10

G

García, Juanita C.: (4-97) 3, 12; (10-97) 7, 15
GENDER (*see* EQUITY, GENDER)
GOALS 2000: (1-97) 3-5, 10; (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (3-97) 1-2, 13-14; (3-97) 8-9; (10-97) 3-4, 11
González, Josue M.: (5-97) 8-9, 14
Goodman, Christie L.: (10-97) 3-4, 11
Green, Laura Chris: (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (5-97) 1, 10-13
GREEN FACTORS: (3-97) 6-7, 10; (9-97) 11-12
Growing Interest in Dual Language Programs: (4-97) 5
Gutiérrez, Elisa de León: (7-97) 9

H

HIGHER EDUCATION
ACCESS: (2-97) 3-4, 15-16; (2-97) 7-10; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (7-97) 4-5, 8
HIGH POVERTY, HIGH PERFORMING (*see* SCHOOLS, HIGH POVERTY, HIGH PERFORMING)
High Poverty, High Performing: High Hope! H. Bauer: (6-97) 3
Hispanic Dropouts: Addressing the Leak in the Pipeline to Higher Education, M. R. Montecel: (7-97) 4-5, 8

I

"I Am What I Am" – Resolving Conflict Peacefully, J. García: (10-97) 7, 15
IDRA's Project FLAIR: Professional Development Model Addresses Literacy Development from a Schoolwide Perspective, R. López del Bosque: (1-97) 6-7, 14
IDRA Technical Assistance Available on Using Technology Effectively on Your Campus: (9-97) 2
Immigrant Students' Rights to Attend Public Schools: (8-97) 4
IMMIGRANTS: (2-97) 7-10; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11; (8-97) 4
INSTRUCTION: (4-97) 1-2, 11; (4-97) 3, 12; (4-97) 4-5, 10; (5-97) 1, 10-13; (5-97) 3-4, 6; (5-97) 7, 14; (5-97) 8-9, 14; (8-97) 7, 20
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY (*see* TECHNOLOGY)
INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
PUBLICATIONS: (1-97) 14-15; (2-97) 8; (3-97) 7, 15, 16-17; (4-97) 4, 9; (5-97) 16; (5-97) 14, 16; (6-97) 7; (7-97) 13; (8-97) 17, 18, 19
STAFF AND BOARD: (1-97) 16; (8-97) 20; (5-97) 16; (10-97) 15; (10-97) 16
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EVENTS: (1-97) 11, 13; (2-97) 6, 15; (3-97) 12, 14, 15, 18; (4-97) 9, 10; (5-97) 6, 13; (5-97) 3; (6-97) 11, 12; (7-97) 10, 14, 16; (8-97) 5, 12, 17; (9-97) 2; (9-97) 10, 15; (10-97) 11

J

Johnson, Joseph F.: (3-97) 10; (6-97) 6-7
Johnson, Roy: (3-97) 6-7, 10; (9-97) 3-6, 15

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

K

Knight, Dorothy L.: (8-97) 7, 20; (10-97) 12-14

L

Language Acquisition (*see* Bilingual Education)

Leadership: (8-97) 13-14, 16; (8-97) 15-16; (8-97) 1-2, 10-11; (8-97) 8-10; (9-97) 8-9, 16; (9-97) 13, 16; (9-97) 1, 14-15

Lifelong Learning (*see* Leadership)

Lilliott, Liz: (1-97) 8-9, 13

Literacy (*see* Reading)

Look Who's Listening: Communication Between Parents and Teenagers, A.M. Montemayor: (10-97) 5-6, 15

López del Bosque, Rogelio: (1-97) 6-7, 14;

Los Regalos Del Cuento: Accelerating Biliteracy with FLAIR, J.C. Garcia: (4-97) 3, 12

Low Income Does Not Cause Low School Achievement: Creating a Sense of Family and Respect in the School Environment, A. Revilla and Y. De La Garza Sweeney: (6-97) 4, 8

M

Maroney, Oanh H.: (3-97) 1-2, 13-14; (8-97) 1-2, 10-11

A Measuring Stick for Standards and TEKS: Meeting the Needs of Second Language Learners, L. C. Green and A. Solís: (2-97) 1-2, 12-14

McCollum, Pam (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11

Mobilization For Equity: (8-97) 13-14, 16; (8-97) 15-16

Montecel, María Robledo: (3-97) 19-20; (7-97) 4-5, 8

Montemayor, Aurelio M. (8-97) 1-2, 10-11; (8-97) 13-14, 16; (10-97) 5-6, 15

Montes, Felix: (5-97) 3-4, 6

Multicultural Education: (4-97) 6-7; (5-97) 5-6

N

New Book Highlights School Finance Reform: (5-97) 16

The Nurturing of Parent Leadership, A.M. Montemayor: (8-97) 13-14, 16

O

Organizing for Schooling (see Schools, Restructuring; and Funds and Programs Coordination)

P

Parents

- Involvement: (2-97) 13; (8-97) 1-2, 10-11; (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11; (8-97) 7, 20; (8-97) 8-10; (8-97) 13-14, 16; (8-97) 15-16; (8-97) 6; (10-97) 5-6, 15
- Valuing: (8-97) 1-2, 10-11; (8-97) 8-10
- Quotes From: (8-97) 13-14, 16; (8-97) 15-16

Parents Speak Out: Quality Education for All Children, A.A. Romero: (8-97) 15-16

Perspectives on "Leadership," J. Supik: (9-97) 13, 16

Policies Affecting Bilingual Education and ESL Programs, E. Gutiérrez: (7-97) 9

Policy (*see* Schools, Policy)

Preschool (*see* Early Childhood Education)

Principal of National Blue Ribbon School Says High Poverty Schools Can Excel, Interview: (6-97) 1-2, 9-12

Private School Vouchers Debated: (7-97) 12

Professional Development: (1-97) 6-7, 14; (9-97) 2; (10-97) 7, 15

Promising Practices: (1-97) 8-9, 13; (4-97) 3, 12; (6-97) 1-2, 9-12; (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11; (9-97) 1, 14-15; (10-97) 5-6, 15; (10-97) 12-14

Property Tax Relief, Tax Equity and Funding Equalization, A. Cortez: (3-97) 3, 5, 16

Q

Questions and Examples for Technology in Schools, J.L. Vigil: (4-97) 4-5, 10

R

Race/Racial Equity (*see* Equity)

Reading: (1-97) 6-7, 14; (4-97) 1-2, 11 (*see also* FLAIR)

Redesigning Federal Programs to Strengthen Schools' Effectiveness, Editorial, G.N. Tirozzi: (3-97) 8-9

Retention (*see* Teachers; Students)

Revilla, Anita Tijerina: (6-97) 4, 8; (10-97) 3-4

Romero, Anna Alicia: (2-97) 7-10; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (8-97) 15-16

Rubio, Olga G.: (4-97) 6-7

S

Safe and Drug-Free Schools: (8-97) 7, 20; (10-97) 1, 10-11; (10-97) 2; (10-97) 3-4, 11; (10-97) 7, 15; (10-97) 8-9; (10-97) 12-14

School Finance Equity and Property Tax Changes: (4-97) 8

School Finance Reform and Intra-District Equity: An Excerpt, J.A. Cárdenas: (3-97) 11-12

School Improvement, Parent Involvement and Prevention, D.L. Knight and J.L. Vigil: (8-97) 7, 20

Schools

- Accountability: (2-97) 7-10
- Facilities and Finance: (2-97) 7-10; (3-97) 3, 5, 16; (3-97) 4; (3-97) 6-7, 10; (3-97) 11-12; (4-97) 8; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (7-97) 12; (9-97) 11-12
- High Performing, High Poverty: (6-97) 1-2, 9-12; (6-97) 3; (6-97) 4, 8; (8-97) 13-14, 16; (8-97) 8-10
- Policy: (2-97) 7-10; (3-97) 3, 5, 16; (4-97) 8; (5-97) 2; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (7-97) 9; (10-97) 1, 10-11; (10-97) 3-4, 11
- Reforms, Restructuring: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (1-97) 3-5, 10; (2-97) 11; (3-97) 1-2, 13-14; (3-97) 8-9; (6-97) 1-2, 9-12

Schools in the Information Society - Make Children Central, F. Montes: (5-97) 3-4, 6

Schoolwide Projects: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (1-97) 6-7, 14; (1-97) 8-9, 13; (3-97) 10; (3-97) 8-9; (6-97) 4, 8; (8-97) 13-14, 16

Schoolwide Projects - A Challenge for Administrators on Campuses with LEP Students, A. Villarreal: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13

Scott, Bradley: (1-97) 3-5, 10;

Sexual Harassment: (7-97) 3, 15

Sexual Harassment Policies and Schools, M. A. Yáñez-Pérez: (7-97) 3, 15

Solís, Adela: (2-97) 1-2, 12-14

Standards: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (2-97) 13; (6-97) 3; (8-97) 1-2, 10-11 (*see also* Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STAR Center: (1-97) 6-7, 14; (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (1-97) 8-9, 13; (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (3-97) 14; (4-97) 5; (5-97) 2; (6-97) 12; (8-97) 6; (8-97) 13-14, 16; (9-97) 11-12; (10-97) 7, 15; (10-97) 12-14
STAR Center Parent Involvement Activities: (8-97) 6
Students: (2-97) 3-4, 15-16; (7-97) 6; (10-97) 3-4, 11; (10-97) 5-6, 15
Attrition/Retention: (7-97) 4-5, 8; (9-97) 3-6, 15; (9-97) 1, 14-15
Limited English Proficient (LEP), Instruction of (*see* Instruction, Bilingual/ESL)
Valuing: (8-97) 8-10; (9-97) 1, 14-15; (2-97) 11; (5-97) 3-4, 6; (6-97) 4, 8; (7-97) 4-5, 8
A Successful Coordination of Funds and Programs Approach: Four Dimensions of the School Restructuring Process, A. Villarreal and O.H. Maroney: (3-97) 1-2, 13-14
Sundermann-Villavicencio, Carlos: (10-97) 8-9
Supik, Josie: (9-97) 13, 16

T

Teachers and Administrators: (4-97) 6-7
Quotes From: (1-97) 8-9, 13; (6-97) 1-2, 9-12
Teaching Strategies (*see* Instruction)
Technical Assistance Available on Using Technology Effectively: (5-97) 3
Technology: (4-97) 4-5, 10; (5-97) 1, 10-13; (5-97) 3-4, 6; (5-97) 5-6; (5-97) 8-9, 14; (5-97) 2
Distance Learning: (5-97) 7, 14
Technical Assistance: (5-97) 3; (7-97) 10; (9-97) 2
Web Sites: (5-97) 2; (4-97) 2; (5-97) 11, 15; (6-97) 9; (7-97) 2, 7; (8-97) 2, 11; (10-97) 14
Technology in Education: Time to Face the Monster, Editorial, J.M. González: (5-97) 8-9, 14
Testing (*see* Assessment)
Texas Dropout Alert: Where are the 147,000 Students Lost from the Freshman Class of 1993-94?, R. Johnson: (9-97) 3-6, 15
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): (2-97) 1-2, 12-14; (7-97) 9 (*see also* Assessment)
Texas Legislature Considers Much for Education, Accomplishes Little, A. Cortez and A.A. Romero: (7-97) 1-2, 10-15
Texas Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities 1996-97 Recognition Program, D.L. Knight: (10-97) 12-14
Thinking about Learning: The Community and Academic Standards, O.H. Maroney and A.M. Montemayor: (8-97) 1-2, 10-11
Tirozzi, Gerald N.: (3-97) 8-9
Two Innovative El Paso Schools Bring Together Teachers and the Community, P. McCollum: (8-97) 3, 5-6, 11

U

Use of Public Money for Private Schooling: (2-97) 7-10; (7-97) 1-2, 10-15; (7-97) 12
Using the Internet for Policy Information: (5-97) 2

V

Vigil, Joseph L.: (4-97) 4-5, 10; (8-97) 7, 20
Villarreal, Abelardo: (1-97) 1-2, 11-13; (3-97) 1-2, 13-14

W

What It Means to be "Una Persona Educada," Editorial, C.P. Cortez: (8-97) 8-10
Whatever It Takes! Editorial, J. Johnson: (6-97) 6-7
The Whole School, the Whole Child, Editorial, L. Lilliott: (1-97) 8-9, 13
Would You Read Me a Story?: In Search of Reading Strategies that Work for the Early Childhood Classroom, H. Bauer: (4-97) 1-2, 11

Y

Yánez-Pérez, Maria Aurora: (7-97) 3, 15

IDRA Newsletter Focus Issues

Each *IDRA Newsletter* concentrates on one particular topic. In 1997, the topics included the following.

Organizing for Schooling
Volume XXIII, No. 1, January

Standards and Assessment
Volume XXIII, No. 2, February

Coordination of Funds and Programs
Volume XXIII, No. 3, March

Teaching and Learning
Volume XXIII, No. 4, April

Instructional Technology
Volume XXIII, No. 5, May

High Poverty, High Performing Schools
Volume XXIII, No. 6, June-July

Policy
Volume XXIII, No. 7, August

Parent, Family and Community Involvement
Volume XXIII, No. 8, September

Leadership Development
Volume XXIII, No. 9, October

Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools
Volume XXIII, No. 10, November-December

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Facing Denial - continued from page 8

kids would ever fall between the cracks again. It is always a shame that sometimes a tragedy has to happen before we are moved to action. And so we tried building on that event over the next year. I wish I could say that we succeeded in building an effective prevention program, but the reality is that we were unable to break through the denial in the community and to some degree among some of our staff. Many of us left in total frustration by the end of that year.

In retrospect, I did learn many lessons. I left that school and for the next seven years I worked in prevention and became very well acquainted with effective prevention methods. Knowing what I know now and what I knew then, how could we have done a better job at that school, not just for Benny but for all of the students?

Reprinted with permission from the artist: John Branch, *San Antonio Express-News*

First of all we would have to break through the denial around the issues of drug abuse and violence. Students, teachers, administration, school board, parents and community members would have to overcome the paralyzing denial that kept us from acting in a unified way. Teachers would need to know not only how to identify students with drug abuse problems, but also what to do about it as individuals. They would have to learn to play the role of friend, counselor, guardian. All the adults in the system would have to know what to say when questions come up about drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and violence. Adults would need to model behavior, they would quit smoking, the alcoholic teacher would be told to either get help or to get out of education. Each teacher would learn to recognize all of the teachable moments that come our way as teachers.

Rather than a punitive system, there would be a system of support. At school there would need to be a system for referrals to counseling, treatment if necessary, support groups for youth most in need, social skills development, honest, clear-cut information rather than scare tactics, and clear consistent no-use messages. There would be community partnerships with other agencies to provide seamless services for the students and their families.

We would expect that parents would need to be supportive of the school's expectations, and we would actively solicit their participation. It would mean that the police would have to break up the Friday night keggers and arrest the adults who provided the youths with the alcohol or the drugs. It would mean that parents would be indignant if any adult or parent supplied minors with beer at a private party. It would mean that the star basketball players who had been caught drinking the weekend before the big game would not be allowed to play even if it meant losing the game. It would mean that a student returning from treatment could not return to a home where others were abusing drugs and alcohol until there was an intervention with the entire family.

We would recognize that prevention would target the entire school system, the entire community and the total environment. We would recognize that prevention is a kindergarten through 12th grade program. We would recognize that prevention is not just about eliminating drugs and alcohol. It's about preventing AIDS, suicide, teen pregnancy, dropouts, violence, gangs and vandalism. It's about building the self-esteem, pride, respect, and dignity of all children and youth.

It would mean developing a nurturing environment where there would be mutual respect for one another, where culture and language differences were regarded as strengths rather than as deficits. Racism and sexism would not be tolerated. The staff would confront poor and unacceptable behavior each and every time it occurred. And the school board would be able to confront a difficult discipline problem even if it involved the doctor's kid, or the judges' son or the lawyer's daughter.

Creating safe, disciplined drug-free school environments is a cornerstone of everything else that is done to help children and youth to succeed academically. An effective prevention program is one component of a schoolwide effort that must exist if we are to improve teaching and learning. Good prevention is about helping children to become resilient people despite the adversity that they face in their lives. If we can create children with high, positive expectations, children who have a sense of competence, who feel that they can control their environment, who have a sense of future and sense of purpose, children who can play well, work well, cooperate with one another and respect other people, other cultures and other languages, and if we can create children and youth who can learn independently, collectively, cooperatively, who can think critically, and reflectively, we will create adults who will be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults. The way we do that is through inclusion, by developing a school climate that is nurturing, caring, academically rigorous, disciplined and demanding. We must be willing to face head-on all the problems that plague our children and that defeat our youth at school and in our communities. To do anything less is to enable defeat and failure.

Carlos Sundermann-Villavicencio is the director of the Northwest Regional Assistance Center (Region X) at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon.

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Alternative Education - continued from page 1

who are not assigned.

- The program curriculum focuses on English language arts, mathematics, science, history and self-discipline.
- The program provides for students' educational and behavioral needs.
- The program provides supervision and counseling.

According to summary data recently compiled by the Texas Education Agency, approximately 80,000 students were referred to alternative educational programs in 1996-97. Beyond summary data on numbers of students, however, very little other information has been compiled on these programs. In a recent meeting of at-risk coordinators, one group volunteered that a new emerging indicator of a student's potential for dropping out is "referral to alternative education programs." Few people would propose that the alternative programs were created to encourage some students to leave school. But if this is indeed an unintended by-product, the concept as it is currently being implemented will require much more critical examination.

A Need for Assessing Implementation

Two years after the creation of alternative educational programs little information had been made available about the effects of these programs on students or schools. Given this lack of information, it is vital that educators and communities ask some key questions. These include:

- How many such programs have been created to date? Are there schools or districts that have chosen to forego them or have found such programs unnecessary?
- If there are instances where no alternative education programs are in operation, what are common characteristics among those districts or schools?
- In districts that are operating alternative education programs, what is the total number of students who are enrolled and what is the demographic profile of those being referred?

Other critical **student-related questions** involve how students are referred to these alternative settings and by whom. It would also be useful to know for what periods of time they are referred and the processes used to reintegrate them into the "regular" program.

For those interested in **due process issues**, it may help to ask what role students' parents play in local referrals and what opportunities for parents are made available to question or appeal the school or teacher's action before it is implemented.

Those interested in **curricular issues** may want more information about the course offerings available to students at these alternative settings. It might also be interesting to examine the textbooks and materials available in alternative programs and to assess the extent to which they are comparable to materials in the "regular" program.

For those who are more concerned with **personnel issues**, it would be important to request a profile of staff members who are assigned to these alternative educational settings, including gender, race and ethnicity, average salaries, average years of experience, degrees held, and the extent to which staff members are teaching in their areas of certification.

Since the rationale for creating these alternative settings suggests that teachers are expected to improve instructional opportunities for **students who are not referred**, it is fair to ask whether or not instruction has indeed improved in settings where some students were sent to alternative educational programs. Did smaller class sizes result? Did TAAS test scores go up? Is there any evidence that the creation of these programs created fewer disciplinary problems in the schools from which they were removed?

Proponents of alternative education programs may feel uncomfortable with these questions. Some may even become indignant that such questions are being raised, in part because the alternative programs were created in response to the desire of some educators to remove whatever students they felt were disruptive in their schools or classes. Parents and student advocates, however, are justified in raising any of the questions suggested above.

Those choosing to begin the inquiry of local alternative programs should not be surprised to encounter some opposition to their efforts, particularly from those who feel they have benefited in some way from the unbridled authority that was provided to them in this legislation.

In conversations with educators, we have discovered that some classroom teachers and school administrators perceive the alternative program referral prerogative as a "right" and bristle at the notion that anyone would question the effects of those practices. While few would oppose the idea that teachers should have the right to remove seriously disruptive students, preliminary data released by the Texas Education Agency reveals an interesting trend. The majority of students who have been referred to alternative programs were not referred for the more serious violations outlined in the

Alternative Education - continued on page 11

Components of Effective Alternative Education Programs

- ✔ Lower student-to-staff ratio.
- ✔ Strong and stable leadership.
- ✔ Highly trained and carefully selected staff.
- ✔ A vision and set of objectives for the program that are shared by all staff and integrated into how staff and administrators interact with the program.
- ✔ Districtwide support of programs.
- ✔ Innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real-life learning.
- ✔ Working relations with all parts of the school system and with other collaborating agencies that provide critical services to youth.
- ✔ Linkages between schools and workplaces.
- ✔ Intensive counseling and monitoring.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. "Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide." U.S. Department of Education. Internet posting (September 1996).

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Coming Up!

In January, the *IDRA Newsletter* focuses on bilingual education.

Alternative Education - continued from page 10

education code. They were referred for reasons classified under the "local criteria" districts are allowed to prescribe (see "Are We Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools?" on Page 3).

The large numbers of students enrolled in these programs and the large numbers of alternative education program schools created have even led to the development of "alternative accountability" mechanisms for those programs. Why these schools should be judged differently from the criteria applied to all other schools is a question that begs an answer.

The alternative education program concept has been in place a sufficient amount of time to assess how it is working and, more specifically, whether or not students *as a whole* are benefiting from it.

The IDRA Institute for Policy and Leadership is conducting a statewide analysis of alternative educational programs. Local communities are encouraged to conduct their own, more comprehensive evaluation of alternative education programs guided by some of the questions posed in this article and supplemented by other questions that relate to their local situation.

Resources

Texas Education Agency. *Administrative Memorandum* (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, September 9, 1997).

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***Are We Creating** - continued from page 4*

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Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In September, IDRA worked with **6,803** teachers, administrators and parents through **101** training and technical assistance activities and **110** program sites in **11** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

- English as a Second Language Strategies for Social Studies
- *WOW Workshop on Workshops*
- Gifted and Talented Bilingual Education
- Excellence and Equity through Technology Network (EETNET)
- Parent Leadership for Public Schools

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Midland ISD, Texas
- Zapata ISD, Texas
- New Orleans Parish, Louisiana
- Seguin ISD, Texas
- Education Service Center XIV, Texas
- Rio Grande Texas Association for Bilingual Education
- Truth or Consequences Public Schools, New Mexico

Activity Snapshot

The IDRA *Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative for Equity* assists school districts in developing comprehensive approaches to raise awareness about peer-to-peer sexual harassment. For example, in one district, the center provided training to more than 120 principals, assistant principals and key administrative personnel to help them understand their responsibilities under the law regarding sexual harassment. Administrators used school-based examples and activities to practice identifying and responding to sexual harassment charges between students, between staff and students, and between employees. Training videos, activities and handouts equipped the administrators with practical tools they could implement immediately to ensure a minimized risk of maintaining a sexually hostile environment on their campuses.

Regularly, IDRA staff provide services to:

- public school teachers
- parents
- administrators
- other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- training and technical assistance
- evaluation
- serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210/684-8180.

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Texas Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities 1996-97 Recognition Program

Dorothy L. Knight, M.S.

In the absence of a national recognition program for the "Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities" programs in schools, the STAR Center* conducted a modified statewide recognition program in order to encourage and support schools to continue the development and implementation of programs that decrease violence and drug use in the schools. All schools in the state were given the opportunity to apply for recognition in the early spring of 1997. The streamlined application emphasized the identification of results of prevention programs in the schools, as evidenced by data that reflected a decrease in violence and disciplinary action and an increase in parent and community involvement.

To determine the nature and effectiveness of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities programs, representatives from the STAR Center (assisted by prevention specialists from Education Service Centers 4, 7, 10 and 11, Marcie Alford of Hardin ISD and Linda Ceigel of Eagle-Mountain Saginaw ISD) visited 11 of the schools that had applied for statewide recognition. These visits consisted of a review of data regarding the programs, inspection of materials used in the programs, and interviews of school staff, students, parents and community members. Based on the information gathered by the site visit teams, nine schools were chosen for recognition, and one was awarded special acknowledgment for its prevention program.

Decisions to award recognition were based on information that verified the extent and nature of the school's prevention program and reflected the school's response to identify challenges specific to the school and its community. Thus, both the comprehensiveness and the responsiveness of the program were considered indicators of success, as verified by data that reflected improvement in the safety and discipline of students and programs that increased student participation and parent and community involvement.

A review of the information gathered by the site visit teams provides some insight into the nature of effective prevention programs as well as details about specific program components. Because the number of schools visited was not extensive, it must be noted that the information gathered provides indications that need further research to establish a sound data base. However, the following observations are intended to provide not only the proverbial food for thought but also grist for the mill – concepts that can result in useful programs, policies and practices.

Effective Prevention Programs and School Improvement

An examination of the nature of effective prevention programs and school improvement strategies reveals some striking similarities in the goals and methods of each. Because the goal of prevention programs is to create the social and academic conditions necessary to support students in learning and maintaining healthy behavior, schools engaged in the active process of improvement are more likely to be implementing strategies that increase student achievement by improving the environment as well as the learning methodology.

Recent research documents the characteristics of successful schools. Such schools utilize the following (for further discussion see Knight and Vigil, 1997):

- Foundation of core beliefs, such as the belief that all students can learn.
- Collaborative learning.
- Higher order thinking skills.
- Interdisciplinary learning.
- Transition programs, such as vertical teaming.
- Communication with parents and communities.

Because of the similarities of systemic school improvement and prevention programs, it is worthwhile to look at the drug use and violence prevention programs of schools in relation to the overall function of the school. One way to understand this relationship is by reviewing the Texas Education Agency accountability rating of the schools awarded Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities recognition.

A correlation between the success of schools, as evidenced by student achievement, and effective prevention programs is most apparent with the elementary schools awarded recognition: three of the four elementary schools had achieved a "recognized" accountability rating. It is notable that one of the three middle schools awarded recognition had achieved a "recognized" rating and none of the three high schools awarded recognition had achieved a "recognized" rating.

Elementary Schools

Since the characteristics of successful schools described above are found most often in elementary schools, it is perhaps safe to say that drug use and violence prevention programs in elementary schools that are meeting the needs of their students, as evidenced by the successful achievement of students, are a natural extension of the school organization and climate. The social and decision-making skills taught by prevention programs promote the same healthy behavior that is supported by a caring and learner-centered environment.

Because the involvement of parents and community members is usually greater in elementary schools, the support and caring that students experience in these schools generate a greater feeling of belonging that students can acknowledge. In fact, almost all elementary students in the recognized schools visited by the STAR Center teams reported the caring of their teachers and administrators as the best aspect of their school.

In addition to providing a caring environment, elementary schools with successful prevention programs have developed and implemented programs to deal with challenges that are specific to the school and community and/or implemented special support programs for children from families that are dealing with alcoholism or other drug use. Most of these schools have also implemented various mediation, conflict resolution and/or self-management programs that have been successful in decreasing school violence and improving discipline.

Middle Schools and Junior High Schools

The diverse needs of students in middle schools and junior high schools dramatically affect the ability of the school to meet the needs of its students. And although a caring environment is a foundation for promoting the well-being of students, the many changes students experience at this age, including how they handle information

Texas Safe and Drug-Free - continued on page 13

Texas Safe and Drug-Free - continued from page 12

as well as the social and cultural changes of puberty, necessitate the development of more specialized drug use and violence prevention programs.

For students in early adolescence, the need for more intense early intervention becomes a critical factor. Strategies that identify students who are considered at risk of violent behavior and substance abuse are only as useful as the intervention programs developed to address their needs. The success of these programs depends on the resources (both in direct services provided by staff and training for staff) and the commitment of the school to find and dedicate the necessary resources. Despite the challenges of implementation, early intervention must be viewed as a crucial part of a successful prevention program.

Other support programs, such as transition assistance programs, recreational activities, community service activities, peer mediation and conflict resolution, mentoring programs, parent and community involvement, and especially the availability of peer support groups, keep students connected to the school, their families, the community and each other. Thus, the need for caring can be met by various strategies that appeal to different types of learners and individuals.

The middle school and junior high school prevention programs awarded recognition were responsive to the special needs of students in environments that varied greatly. Perhaps the most clearly identifiable characteristic of these programs was the development of programs tailored to the school and community. Students in this age group who were interviewed by the STAR Center teams were more likely to cite their support group or a specific teacher or sponsor as the best aspect of their school. Some students this age also expressed appreciation for the variety of educational activities and opportunities available in their school.

High Schools

The critical nature of early intervention remains evident in drug use and violence prevention programs in the high schools. The need for teens to remain connected, as well as develop skills that will be useful to them in both their academic and personal lives, becomes an even more difficult task for the school to accomplish as the opportunities for dangerous and anti-social behavior increase.

The responsibility of high schools to provide an alternate education program for students who have identified behavior problems or students who have different learning and schedule needs (such as teenage parents) provides an opportunity to intervene and recover students who might otherwise discontinue their education. The use of prevention strategies in alternate education programs can create an environment in these programs that focuses on recovery and redirection rather than punishment.

The high school programs awarded recognition were effective in developing "safety net" programs that benefitted students with special needs as well as providing a variety of activities and opportunities that students appreciated. Most students in this age group cited peer support groups and diverse opportunities for academic and social involvement as the most significant quality in their school.

Recommendations

In order to develop and implement effective prevention programs or improve the quality of existing programs, schools can hardly go wrong by pursuing school improvement initiatives that focus on academic achievement. The self-study and planning that are a necessary part of school improvement usually result in increased awareness of identified needs and the development of strategies focused on achieving specific goals. This process benefits prevention programs as well as academic programs.

One characteristic of a school that is seeking to identify areas of concern and develop strategies to address these concerns is the existence of a planning process that produces a campus improvement plan that truly reflects the school's programs, policies and practices. Such a plan is reviewed and revised annually by the campus site-based decision-making team and others as appropriate.

The goals and objectives for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities programs should be reflected in the campus improvement plan. Since many school improvement initiatives, such as parent involvement, are required by other federally funded programs as well as Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (Title IV), the goals can include strategies specific to Title IV and other programs.

In addition to pursuing school improvement initiatives that create a caring climate, elementary schools would do well

Texas Safe and Drug-Free - continued on page 14

Prevention Works!

- In 1979, 25 million people in the United States used an illegal drug during the preceding month. In 1995, 12.8 million used an illegal drug in the past month, a decrease of nearly 50 percent (SAMHSA National Household Survey).
- In the 1980s, complete abstinence from drugs was claimed by fewer than one in 13 high school seniors. In 1995 nearly one out of five seniors reported complete abstinence, an increase of nearly 250 percent (National Institute on Drug Abuse, Monitoring the Future Survey).
- Researchers in a study of 6,000 students in New York state found that the odds of drinking, smoking and using marijuana were 40 percent lower among students who participated in a school-based substance abuse program in grades seven through nine than among their counterparts who did not (Cornell University).
- Successful substance abuse prevention also leads to reductions in traffic fatalities, violence, unwanted pregnancy, child abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, injuries, cancer, heart disease and lost productivity.

Prevention programs can:

- Encourage change in youth behavior patterns that are indicative of eventual substance abuse.
- Improve parenting skills and family relationships.
- Change individual characteristics that are predictive of later substance abuse.
- Reduce delinquent behaviors among youth that are frequently associated with substance abuse and drug-related crime.
- Transmit generic life skills.

Source: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (www.health.org).

Texas Safe and Drug-Free *- continued from page 13*

to develop and/or maintain activities that help students learn self-management and peer mediation, since evidence indicates these programs help students make positive changes in behavior.

Prevention programs for middle schools and high schools must address the need for an early intervention process that identifies students who are experiencing academic or behavior problems and supports them in developing the skills needed to succeed academically and personally. Such programs require training for all staff and many times require on-site specialists who work with students individually to counsel and redirect behavior and attitudes. Alternative education programs can function as a means to recover and redirect students if they include personal support as well as accelerated instruction to students who have experienced academic failure.

The most obvious need for prevention improvement at all levels is the implementation of a curriculum that integrates academic instruction with violence and drug use prevention. Despite the existence and availability of such a curriculum from the Texas Education Agency, few schools have implemented the lessons in a consistent manner. One reason for this is the necessity for staff training and commitment to conduct the classroom lessons. The availability of a new curriculum developed by the Texas Education Agency that includes violence prevention as well as user friendly technology should support schools in this effort. Training for implementation will be available through the education service centers.

Finally, increasing parent and community involvement, especially in secondary schools, is a strategy that deserves the attention and resources of schools as they become centers of communities that support children in learning to be healthy and productive adults. Full participation of families will require schools to adopt strategies that make each campus a place that welcomes and supports all parents and family members.

Because of the complex nature of violence and drug use, strategies to deal with these challenges must address the need for comprehensive and focused programs based on the research of successful programs. Research to build a data base on the nature and characteristics of successful prevention programs must be the next step.

Resources

Knight, D. and J. Vigil. "School Improvement, Parent Involvement and Prevention," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, September 1997).

Program profiles of all schools awarded recognition or acknowledgment are available from the STAR Center web site (www.starcenter.org).

** The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas. It is a collaboration of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation. For information about STAR Center services, call 1-888-FYI-STAR.*

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Web Sites

Drug Abuse Prevention Internet Resources

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention www.samhsa.gov/csap/
National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information www.health.org
Office of National Drug Control Policy www.whitehouse.gov
Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education www.prideusa.org
Partnership for a Drug-Free America www.drugfreeamerica.org

Violence Prevention Internet Resources

National School Safety Center www.nssc1.org
National Youth Gang Center www.iir.com/nygc
Partnerships Against Violence Online www.pavnet.org
U.S. Department of Justice, Justice Information Center www.ncjrs.org

Other Related Internet Resources

CDC Adolescent and School Health Information www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash
Creative Partnership for Prevention www.cpprev.org
Intercultural Development Research Association www.idra.org
Safe & Drug Free Schools Program www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/
STAR Center* www.starcenter.org

**A collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation.*

Upcoming Events

National Training Conference and Work Session
Countdown 2000: Equity and the U.S. Department of Education's Seven Priority Initiatives

Sponsored by:
Title IV Desegregation and Equity Centers

Host Center:
IDRA Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative for Equity

January 11-13, 1998
San Antonio, Texas

For more information, call Carol Chavez at IDRA, 210/684-8180 e-mail: idra@idra.org URL: www.idra.org

National Association for Bilingual Education
Bilingual Education: Good for Us!

February 24-28, 1998
Dallas, Texas

For more information, call 202/898-1829 e-mail: conference@nabe.org URL: www.nabe.org

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La Semana del Niño
Early Childhood Educator's Institute™

April 20-23, 1998
Radisson Hotel
Downtown Market Square
San Antonio, Texas

For more information, call Carol Chavez at IDRA, 210/684-8180 e-mail: idra@idra.org URL: www.idra.org

"I Am What I Am" - continued from page 7

replicate. Our training sessions are geared toward helping counselors, teachers or administrators begin the process of implementing a peer mediation program on their campus.

According to Albert Mehrabian, there are seven key elements needed for the successful implementation of the program (1968).

- **Secure administrative support**. A commitment from the administration must be made to ensure the program is incorporated into the existing disciplinary system.
- **Obtain teacher support and involvement**. All teachers must believe in the effectiveness of the program. They must have a working knowledge of the conflict resolution model. They should be encouraged to participate in the overall program.
- **Identify an implementation team**. The team should consist of five to seven people, including faculty and staff members, and an administrator who will develop the program plan, promote the program, provide support to the program coordinator, and offer other special skills and support as needed.
- **Design the program**. The team will decide who will be the mediators, what kind of cases will be heard, when and where cases will be heard, how referrals will be solicited, and how confidentiality will be guaranteed.
- **Select mediators**. Mediators should reflect the served population by sex, age, ethnicity, and social and academic standing.
- **Train mediators.** The first year, students should be trained by outside experienced mediators. In subsequent years, the implementation team and the experienced students should become the trainers.
- **Collect and evaluate data**. Data on the number of referrals, mediation sessions, agreements and completed agreements should be collected to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Using these elements, the STAR Center will continue to provide support and technical assistance for initiating, developing and implementing peaceable schools that value human dignity and self-esteem and that work for all students.

Dr. Green Honored by Tex-TESOL

Laura Chris Green, Ph.D., was honored in November by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Tex-TESOL). She was named "Tex-TESOLer of the Year" by the San Antonio area affiliate for her service to Tex-TESOL and to TESOL and for her work in the field of English as a second language. Dr. Green is a senior education associate at IDRA.

Resources

Collier, Rosslyn Falcón. "Basic Transformative Peer Mediation: A Manual for Trainers," (San Antonio, Texas: Youth Peacework Initiative, 1997).

Mehrabian, Albert. "Communication Without Words," *Psychology Today* (1968).

Cárdenas, José. *My Spanish-Speaking Left Foot* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1997).

** The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas. It is a collaboration of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation. For information about STAR Center services call 1-888-FYI-STAR.*

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Look Who's Listening - continued from page 6

in teacher preparation courses.

It is ironic that the information that emerged from the dialogues is not very striking – it is not surprising news that people need to communicate more, or that young people and their parents are experiencing widening gaps. What was learned could be easily read in any number of books or pamphlets, and in fact it is often put into material that is distributed at parent meetings.

The greatest impact is in the experience, the listening and the dialogue. That interaction has to be re-experienced to be meaningful. And so it is the practice of communication – honest speaking and empathetic, unevaluative listening – that must continue.

Impact

Students felt they were treated like adults and had something important to contribute to an adult conversation. Parents felt equally validated, and they felt that they were not going through this alone. They discovered that other parents had similar or worse problems. Students became more aware of the problems their peers were having. Serious home problems were confronted and discussed. Some painful stories were shared and listened to with compassion and understanding.

The students reported that these sessions were clearly different from anything they had experienced before. They felt important. They could understand their parents better. They were appreciative of the parents who took the time to converse with them and who listened to them. They enjoyed it and expressed a desire to meet again.

The dialogues improved communication and increased compassion and respect between parents and young people. They resulted in a greater understanding of the pressures affecting both the child and the parent. Participants will never forget the emotional moments in the sessions. The adults who participated gained new insights into the pain of breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend or of being excluded from a school activity.

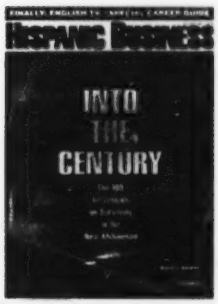
The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has had impressive results on this campus and elsewhere. The students who participate gain a new sense of self-worth. The parent center at this middle school has provided a wonderful opportunity for acknowledging the inherent value and worth of all parents. Bringing together two efforts that value the participants enhances the effects of both programs. Cummings Middle School provides an excellent model. Young people and parents need and deserve to be heard.

Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., is the lead trainer in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be sent to him via e-mail at idra@idra.org. Jennifer Golden, IDRA materials dissemination specialist, contributed to this article by conducting an interview with Sandra A. Powers.

Dr. Robledo Montecel Honored by "Hispanic Business" Magazine and "La Prensa" Newspaper

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., executive director of IDRA, was selected in October as one of the "100 Most Influential Hispanics in 1997" by *Hispanic Business* magazine. This annual listing focused in 1997 on two areas: Hispanic academics and educators, and individuals who are making a difference in improving the quality of life for Hispanics in urban and inner-city communities.

In addition to the listing and an accompanying photograph of Dr. Robledo Montecel, the national magazine printed her response to the question: "Will the elimination of race and gender considerations from university admissions policies hurt Hispanic applicants?" From the group of 100, 86 percent responded "Yes." Dr. Robledo Montecel elaborated: "A study by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board found recently that no single factor (including economic status, parents' education level, test scores, language, etc.) can ensure levels of minority access comparable to the levels that are being achieved by using racial background as a factor. The impact of the *Hopwood* decision and the attorney general's opinion is already being felt by Texas public institutions of higher learning as they are experiencing a dramatic decrease in minority applicants."



Dr. Robledo Montecel also received in October the *La Prensa Hispanic Heritage Celebration Award for Education* for excellence, commitment and dedication to the development of Hispanic heritage. *La Prensa* is a bilingual Spanish-English newspaper published semiweekly in San Antonio. Its objectives for the awards are to promote outstanding Hispanic men and women who have made important contributions to school districts, municipal, state and federal government. Other award recipients included Mr. Edward Riojas, Jr., San Antonio Air Logistics Center, Kelly Air Force Base; State Rep. Christine Hernández, District 124, San Antonio; Aurora Muñoz González, Health and Human Services, Bexar County.

Tino and Amelia Durán, publishers of La Prensa, *present Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel (center) with her award. (Photo: Robérto Pérez)*

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